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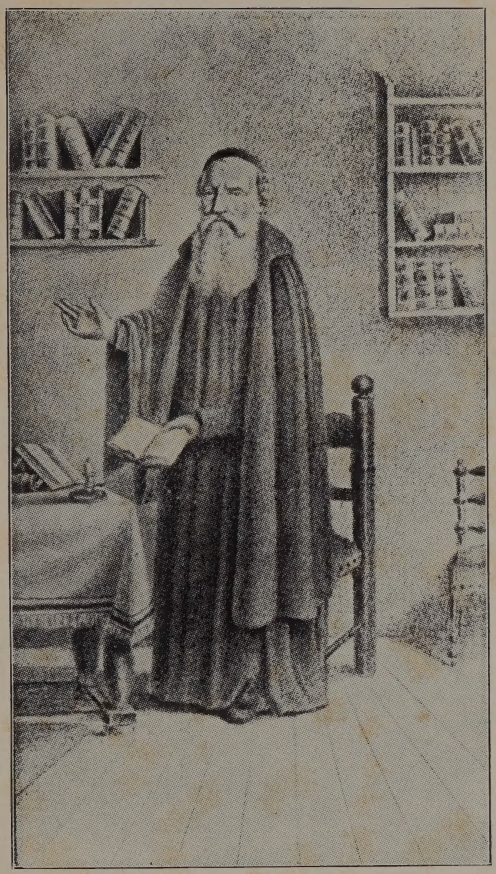

MENNO SIMONS

MENNO SIMONS

APOSTLE OF

THE NONRESISTANT LIFE

By

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"Mennonites in History"
"The Mennonites of America"
"The Mennonites"
"The Coming of the Russian Mennonites"
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PUBLISHERS' PREFACE

Those already interested in Mennonite literature need no introduction to the author of this excellent little biography of Menno Simons. For more than thirty years Dr. C. Henry Smith has spent much of his time in researches in the field of Mennonite history. To the English-speaking world he has given a clear and sympathetic picture of the Mennonites in the books he has already published. He has accumulated a large and representative library of books, pamphlets, periodicals, letters, photographs, etc., some of which are unique, and he has examined other large and valuable collections of Mennonite literature in America and Europe. When Dr. Smith writes anything concerning the Mennonites he speaks with authority and what he says is worth reading.

There are other good biographies of Menno Simons. Those who seek to know Menno Simons' life in greater detail must read them. But there has long been a need for a more concise biography for those who do not have the time, ambition or means to acquire and read the more detailed works. We hope this little volume will find its way into the hands of many who care to know only the most essential facts concerning Menno Simons, and

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that through reading it they may be led to understand and appreciate the principles he taught and practiced.

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MENNO SIMONS

Menno Simons, like his contemporary, Martin Luther, was of peasant origin, having been born in 1496, in a little Frisian village called Witmarsum, located a few miles inland from the North Sea coast. Of his early life we know little beyond what he himself has left us in a brief autobiographical sketch written in his later years. Evidently he was early destined for the church, for in his twenty-eighth year he assumed the duties of the priesthood in what was then his father's village, Pinjum, a mile or two seaward from his own birthplace. His preparation was not extensive, perhaps just enough to meet the simple requirements of a country priest. He knew a little Latin, less Greek, and according to his own confession, no Scripture. Later in life, however, through wide reading he acquired not only a minute knowledge of the Bible, but rather a broad acquaintance with the general field of church history as well.

Early Priesthood

As a priest Menno likely lived the life of his class—an easy-going, care free life, assuming the burdens of his office rather light heartedly. Like his companions he spent his days, he says, in "playing, drinking, and all manner of frivolous diversions." Like them

in all but one very unusual respect—he was blessed with an open mind and a tender conscience. Such being the case, he could not remain entirely oblivious to the revolutionary religious movements that were then shaking all Northern Europe to its very foundations. It is known that quite early in his ecclesiastical career he had access to the writings of Luther which were being surreptitiously circulated throughout the Dutch monasteries and among the Dutch priests in spite of every effort on the part of the higher state and church authorities to suppress them. He began to waver in the faith.

Doubts

The seed of doubt fell upon promising soil. One day while Menno was perfunctorily handling the bread and wine in the celebration of a mass the thought flashed through his mind that this bit of bread could not possibly be the flesh of Christ as he had always been taught to believe. At first he gave the suggestion but little thought, ascribing it to the work of the devil in an attempt to lure a good man away from his faith. But it came back to him again and again. He prayed, and sighed and confessed, but all to no avail. The conviction grew. Finally he was driven to the source of help to which he should have gone in the first place—the New Testament,

which up to this time, he said, had been a sealed book to him. Here, finally, "without any human aid or advice" he found relief from his doubts. The bread was not the body of Christ. His conscience was relieved; and he was greatly encouraged in the belief "that no human authority can bind to eternal death."

But once led to question the validity of a cardinal doctrine of the church, the way was opened to other doubts. Not long after this Menno heard of the beheading at Leuwarden, the capital city of the Province, of one Sikke Freerks, a tailor, because of rebaptism. A second baptism seemed a strange doctrine to the troubled priest. Thus far he had never doubted the validity of infant baptism. But now he again turned to the New Testament for light; and was surprised that he could find no justification there for the doctrine. He consulted his superior at Pinjum who was also forced to admit that there was no direct Scriptural authority for the practice. Menno then turned to Luther, Zwingli and Bullinger; and finding that all these differed not only from one another in their justification of the doctrine but from the whole New Testament teaching on the question, he was forced to the conclusion that infant baptism, too, was an error without Scriptural foundation.

Although convinced that his church taught

erroneous views on two important religious doctrines, yet Menno had no thought of immediately withdrawing from it, or of laying down his priestly office. He had been promoted in the meantime to a more honorable and lucrative position at Witmarsum, his native village, and the future seemed promising. In view of these bright prospects it is not difficult to understand why just at this particular time he was slow to follow his growing convictions to their logical conclusions. It was about this time, too, that Anabaptists of various types began to appear in the vicinity of Witmarsum, and soon after disciples of Jan Matthys from Munster. The new parish priest, who evidently had considerable ability as a speaker and writer, now eased his conscience somewhat and exercised his talents by a vigorous attack upon the latter, gaining quite a reputation among his fellow priests for his ability to successfully refute them. "The report spread far abroad, that I could readily silence these persons," he said. "All looked to me."

But the troubled conscience of this sincere pastor of Witmarsum would not permit him long to live under false pretence. When he saw that his attack upon the errors of the Munsterites was interpreted by his friends as a wholehearted endorsement of the entire Catholic system, he was disturbed in spirit.

Attracted by worldly success, and at the same time convicted by a tender conscience, he evidently hoped for a time to serve both God and Mammon. Although not yet an Anabaptist, still he knew that at heart he agreed with some of their teachings, although he bitterly opposed the erroneous views of the Munsterites. His heart was sorely troubled.

The Tragedy at Bolsward

Not long after this there occurred at Bolsward, not far from Witmarsum, another impressive incident, the third in the course of Menno's gradual conversion, which had a decisive influence upon his future career. A group of some three hundred Anabaptists, men, women and children, somewhat tainted with the revolutionary theories of Munster, had taken refuge in an old cloister where they were attacked by a small force which had been sent against them by the Provincial governor. These poor deluded enthusiasts took up arms in self-defence, but were soon overpowered and most of them, including Menno's own brother, were put to the sword. Only the surviving women and children were spared.

This catastrophe occurring almost at his own door, and claiming a member of his own family, made a profound impression upon the future leader of the Dutch Anabaptists. The

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courage of these men and women, who, although in error, dared to face death itself for their convictions, disturbed his ease loving conscience; while the need to combat the very errors that were at the bottom of their undoing appealed strongly to his sense of responsibility for the welfare of the weak and erring. "Reflecting upon these things," he says,

> "My soul was so grieved that I could no longer endure it. I thought to myself—I, miserable man, what shall I do? If I continue in this way and live not agreeable to the word of the Lord, according to the knowledge of the truth which I have obtained; if I do not rebuke to the best of my ability the hypocracy, the impenitent, carnal life, the perverted baptism, the Lord's supper, and the false worship of God which the learned teach; if I through bodily fear, do not show them the true foundation of the truth, neither use all my powers to direct the wandering flock, who would gladly do their duty if they knew it, to the true pastures of Christ—O how shall their shed blood, though in error, rise against me in the judgment of the Almighty, and pronounce sentence against my poor miserable soul."

Renunciation of the Papacy

Menno Simons was now ready for the final step. In the month of January of 1536 he laid down his priestly office, renounced the Catholic church, shut the door on a brilliant

career, a life of ease and pleasure; and deliberately chose instead a life of uncertainty, misery, and poverty, constantly threatened with imprisonment, persecution, and death; but at the same time a life of loyalty to his convictions and great service to his fellow men, and of peace with his God. Without in the least belittling the services to the world of men like Luther and Calvin, it must be kept in mind, nevertheless, when comparing their choice with that of Menno Simons', that they made no personal sacrifice in the work they undertook. They never left the church; they rather transformed the machinery and remained at the head of it. They never renounced fat salaries, and positions of ease; they were never despised, but on the contrary highly honored by rulers, both state and church. Menno Simons on the other hand deliberately chose the way of the Cross. For the rest of his days he remained an outlaw, and with his wife and little children a wanderer upon the face of the earth, a reward upon his head. Even those who dared give him and his family food and shelter paid for their kindness with their lives.

Referring later in life to this contrast Menno says,

> "For eighteen years now I, my poor feeble wife and little children have endured extreme anxiety, oppression, affliction, misery, and

> persecution; and at the peril of my life have been compelled everywhere to live in fear and seclusion; yea, while the state ministers repose on beds of ease and of soft pillows, we generally have to hide ourselves in secluded corners; while they appear at weddings and banquets with great pomp, with pipe and lute, we must be on guard when the dogs bark lest the captors be on hand. Whilst they are saluted as doctors, lords, and teachers on every hand, we have to hear that we are ana-baptists, hedge preachers, deceivers and heretics, and must be saluted in the name of the devil. In short while they are gloriously rewarded for their services with large incomes and easy times, our recompence and portion must be fire, sword and death."

This converted parish priest, it will thus be observed, arrived at his conclusions and convictions through a gradual process, by his own volition, and as a result of an independent study of the Scriptures. He was not swept from his moorings by the enthusiasm of a great popular religious uprising. He seemingly had every earthly reason to remain within his church, and none to withdraw from it—except one, his conscience. In a way he typified the whole Anabaptist movement. Anabaptism as we know was not merely the reappearance of earlier evangelical sects, but rather a spontaneous religious movement among the common people, having its source in a widely read Bible, newly

turned into the vernacular. To this fact is due largely whatever similarity there may have been among the various small religious sects of the time.

Baptized by Obbe Philips

Just what Menno Simons did for the few months following his public renunciation of the Catholic church is not definitely known. Seemingly, he boldly proclaimed his new found faith. So long as he did not openly affiliate with the proscribed Anabaptist group, now rapidly spreading through the land, he might still safely do this without much danger of persecution. But his beliefs were so nearly identical with the prevailing views of that group that affilitation with them sooner or later was inevitable. It was not long, before the close of the year, until he was compelled to leave his native province, and seek refuge across the border in Groningen, where there was still a semblance of religious toleration. Here he was baptized by Obbe Philips, the leader at this time of the Dutch non-resistant Anabaptists. Like Luther and other Reformation leaders who had once been priests, Menno took unto himself a wife, soon after leaving the order, a certain Gertrude, likely from his own native village, who for the rest of her days remained a faithful companion through all the vicissi-

tudes of his precarious life, and shared with him all the dangers and hardships that were his.

At this point, inasmuch as some of the readers of this sketch may not be familiar with the history of these forerunners of the later Mennonites, it may not be amiss to insert a few paragraphs in explanation of the Anabaptist movement.

The Anabaptists

The Anabaptists first formed a radical wing of the Zwinglian movement in the early days of the Swiss reformation. In the initial stages of that revolt from the Catholic church in middle Europe, and especially along the Rhine valley, there were large groups of people who favored a more complete separation of the new religious order from political control than that adopted by either the Reformed or Lutheran establishments. There is ample evidence that even Zwingli himself was not averse for a time to the idea of a free church. This question of the nature of the new church was a matter of debate and discussion between Zwingli and his associates for several years, Zwingli becoming more conservative as the discussions continued. Finally the matter was brought to an issue in the course of several public debates in Zurich between 1523 and 1525, with the great reformer tak-

ing the lead in favor of a conservative establishment, which like the old church would be kept in power by the civil authorities; and Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, George Blaurock, and several others contending for a free church, entirely disassociated from all political authority.

Fundamental Doctrines

A free church involved more, however, than mere freedom from political control. It meant a voluntary organization, composed of free men and women, who of their own volition had formed themselves into such ecclesiastical groups as met their requirements for a true church after the pattern of the New Testament example. So far as political control was concerned it was to be as free and as voluntary as a social club. It consisted of a group of faithful men and women, born of the Spirit, initiated into membership by the rite of baptism upon confession of faith, and democratically controlled. From such a group infants under the age of accountability were, of course, excluded. To be sure this did not mean religious anarchy. Such a group would be bound together by standards of conduct and statements of belief agreed upon. The only means of discipline, however, was exclusion from the group. There was no compulsion of belief by any political

or ecclesiastical outside authority. The break between Zwingli and his radical friends came when the latter, in the early part of the year 1525, inaugurated the voluntary institution by admitting the charter members through the act of baptism, for which reason they soon came to be known by their opponents as "Wiedertaufer," or Anabaptists.

The act of baptism consequently became the bone of contention in the bitter controversy which followed this new movement, because it involved a revolutionary conception of the true church, and a complete repudiation of the state controlled ecclesiastical order, Reformed as well as Catholic. The New Testament rather literally interpreted, and especially the Apostolic church became the basis of the new religious order; and the Sermon on the Mount, its working program. Love, not force, said these pioneers of a new social and religious order, must rule both the church and the world. Since church and state must be entirely independent of one another, and the magistrate had no right to interfere in the affairs of the former, it was impossible in a social order in which religious conformity was enforced by the civil authorities, for a true Christian according to the new conception to exercise the office of the magistracy, and so no Christian could be a magistrate. Since love, not force, must rule

in all our social relations, it is wrong to take human life in the settling of any dispute, either private or public; war consequently, as well as murder, is forbidden the Christian. Revenge has no place in the heart of the follower of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Opposition to the oath no doubt found its justification in the literal interpretation of the Scriptural injunction "Swear not all." Within the church itself the only means of discipline was the ban, which cut off an unruly member from all religious fellowship with his former brethren. These then were the distinctive principles of the Swiss Anabaptists—absolute religious toleration, the law of love and good will applied to the solution of all problems arising out of our social relations, implicit reliance upon the Bible as the source of guidance and inspiration in the whole domain of religion. On other evangelical principles they agreed in the main with the other reformation bodies.

Rapid Spread of Anabaptism

The Anabaptist movement spread rapidly over northern Switzerland, southern Germany, and down the Rhine into the Netherlands. Persecution, the sincere life and simple Gospel message of the enthusiastic apostles of the faith, as well as the immoral lives of many of the state church clergy—all

were strong contributory factors to this rapid spread. This new Gospel appealed especially to the masses, though the early leaders were mostly from the former clergy—all educated men. When driven out of Zurich, Grebel went to Schaffhausen, and other members of the group to Hallau and Waldshut, where Hubmeir, one of the most influential leaders of the cause, was won to the faith. Soon churches were established in Zollicon Grueningen, Appenzell, St. Gall, Berne, Aargau and other regions. In St. Gall, twelve hundred were baptized within a few weeks. Three churches were established in Appenzell, and by 1527 there were thirty-eight congregations in the canton of Zurich, and nearly as many in Berne. So widely and rapidly had the movement spread that by this year nearly all of the northern cantons were represented in a council which had been called to discuss measures for stopping its further growth. By 1530 all northern Switzerland had been permeated by the new faith; but by this time, too, it had reached its peak. Relentless persecution soon killed off all the leaders, drove many of the more timid ones back into the state church, thousands into exile, and hundreds to a slow death within filthy prison walls. By 1535 the congregations that survived were few.

Simultaneously Anabaptism flowed over

into south Germany, where, under the leadership of such enthusiastic missionaries as Hans Denck, Hans Hut, Melchior Hoffman, Michael Sattler, Balthasar Hubmier and Pilgrim Marbeck, for a short time large and flourishing congregations existed in Augsburg, Munich, Regensburg, Salzburg, Passau, Strasburg and other leading commercial and cultural centers. From here the faith was further carried into Austria, Moravia, the Tyrol and the Danubian valleys where under the leadership of Jacob Hutter it assumed a communistic form.

Sebastian Franck's Testimony

Sebastian Franck, a contemporary chronicler, not an Anabaptist, though in many respects in sympathy with some of their evangelical beliefs, speaks of this rapid spread of the faith throughout all these regions as follows:

> "The Anabaptists developed so rapidly that their teaching was soon spread over the land. They soon gained a large following and baptized thousands and drew to themselves many worthy souls. For they taught nothing but love, faith and forbearance. They showed themselves patient under much suffering, humble, and brake bread with one another as evidence of unity and love. They helped one another in all their tribulations, and taught to have all things in common, calling one an-

other brethren. They increased so rapidly that the world feared an uprising, which I hear had no justification whatsoever. They were attacked in many places with great tyranny, being imprisoned, branded, tortured and executed with fire, water and the sword. In a few years large numbers were put to death. The names of over two thousand were posted at different places, most of whom were killed. They died as martyrs, patiently and humbly enduring all these persecutions."

The whole movement it will be observed was confined almost exclusively to the Rhine valley, and the Germanic people—both High and Low. Following the river cities toward the northwest it soon spread over the whole of the Lowlands. It is a mooted question among Anabaptist historians whether the new faith in these regions was of Swiss origin at all, or whether it was not rather of indigenous growth, deeply rooted in soil already well prepared by Waldensians, Brethren of the Common Life, and other evangelical sects which had been undermining the faith of the orthodox church for some time throughout the Netherlands and northwestern Germany. Be that as it may, there was nothing like organized Anabaptism, however, in the Netherlands before the arrival here in 1530 of the unlettered Suabian leatherdresser, but former Lutheran preacher and now enthusiastic apostle of the new faith—Melchior Hoffman.

The Melchiorites

In the above year Hoffman established the first organized Anabaptist congregation in the northwest, in the city of Emden along the North Sea coast in East Friesland, a congregation still existing—the oldest Mennonite church in the world today. From here disciples of his carried the faith to Amsterdam the same year; and soon after, they organized congregations in all the leading cities throughout the Netherlands. Hoffman, as stated, was an ignorant man so far as worldly wisdom was concerned, but exceptionally well read in the Bible, stressing especially the prophetic books. He was an eloquent preacher, and the common people especially flocked to him in masses. At one time he baptized three hundred in the great Minster itself in Emden, so it is said. Together with much that was sound in doctrine and in keeping with the beliefs of the Swiss Anabaptists, Hoffman advocated certain dangerous theories full of dynamite for those troublous times, namely, his militant millenarianism, and his prophecy of an early end of things. His special followers were sometimes known in their day as Melchiorites.

Obbenites

At the same time, side by side with the Melchiorites, there developed a saner type of

Anabaptism, in every respect similar to that of the Swiss movement, but independent of it, under the leadership of one Obbe Philipps. These came to be known throughout the Netherlands as the Obbenites. It was this group to which Menno attached himself.

Simultaneously with this Anabaptist movement in the Netherlands there arose in the year 1535, just across the Dutch border, in the city of Munster, capital of the Bishopric of Munster, a religious and political uprising, inaugurated by a horde of misguided religious enthusiasts who hoped to make Munster their new Jerusalem, and begin here their millenium; but who instead, in the course of one short year, full of horrors, during the siege of the city by the armies of the Bishop of Munster, passed through a period of domestic strife, starvation, decimation by disease, and finally death and execution at the hands of the Bishop's soldiers. Because these so called Munsterites borrowed from the Anabaptists the rite of baptism as the symbol of their independence from the prevailing state and church, they, too, were called Anabaptists; though of spiritual kinship between the two there was none whatever. It was these Munsterites it will be remembered whom Menno bitterly attacked both by speech and pen, while still an ordained priest

in good standing among his brethren in his home parish.

The term Anabaptist it will be seen was given a wide interpretation by the state and church rulers of that day, as well as by the historians of a later day. It was applied indiscriminately to both the violent, fanatical rebels at Munster, and to the peaceful, law abiding, nonresistant Christ-like followers of Grebel and Mantz in Switzerland; and also to the disciples of Jacob Hutter in the Tyrol. Some things all these had in common—they were all separatists; and in the beginning, at least, even the Munsterites sealed the act of separation with the rite of baptism. But in all the fundamentals of an evangelical, living Christian faith, and in loyalty to constituted government, the nonresistants differed from the fanatical adherents of the insane Jan van Leyden as day from night. The bloody orgies of the Munster kingdom, however, gave all Anabaptists an evil name. After this, to all those in authority as well as to nearly all later church historians, Anabaptist meant Munsterite, in spite of the strenuous protests of a large majority of those known by that name, who remained loyal to the simple teaching of the New Testament as they understood it; who never raised a finger in revolt against constituted government; who never even struck back when they

were attacked, and who merely asked for religious toleration and the right to worship God as their consciences directed, perfectly willing all the while that others might share the same rights. With the passing of the Munster kingdom all these violent parties died out, however, and only the peaceful evangelical groups survived. These later came to be known as Mennonites.

Menno Ordained

But to return to Menno Simons, hardly had he cast his lot with the Groningen Anabaptists when the leaders of that movement, recognizing his ability as a leader, urged him to submit to ordination as an elder in the organization. But true to form he refused to assume the responsibilities of leadership, hesitating as he says, because of his

> "limited talents, great ignorance, weak nature, timidity of flesh, the unbounded wickedness, perversity of the world, the powerful sects, subtility of different minds, and the heavy cross"

that would oppress him if he should accept the urgent solicitations of his friends. But on the other hand when he thought

> "of the miserable, starving condition and the needs of these pious God-fearing children, who erred as innocent sheep having no shepherd"

his compassion for his misguided fellow be-

ings overcame his natural timidity, and he finally permitted himself to be ordained a fullfledged elder by the same Obbe Philips who had baptized him a short time before.

His Labors in Groningen and Outlawry

For the next 6 years or so Menno, together with his co-laborers, Obbe and Dirk, the latter's brother, remained in Groningen, earnestly laboring in behalf of his chosen cause—preaching, baptizing, writing, ordaining other elders and organizing the growing church. Occasionally he made a secret visit to the neighboring provinces, including his own fatherland Friesland, where, in 1542, an imperial edict drawn up at Leuwarden, and carrying the name of Emperor Charles V, was issued against him. According to this decree no one was to receive "Minne Symonsz" in his house or on his property, give him shelter, food, or drink, or even to speak with him, or read any of his books, under penalty of loss of property and life as a heretic. To any one who might apprehend the fugitive a reward of one hundred Gulden was promised, a sum about equal to the annual salary of a priest at Witmarsum. In case the informant was an Anabaptist he would be granted full pardon for having been a member of that sect, or for "lesser crimes." It was no doubt the singling out of Menno

for special attention that caused him to leave Groningen in 1543 for East Friesland, where the edicts of Charles did not have the binding power they had in the Netherlands.

Obbe's Defection

It was during this period, about 1540, that Menno experienced a great disappointment in the withdrawal of Obbe Philips from the Anabaptist cause. Obbe, it will be remembered, was the earliest and most influential leader up to this time of the non-resistant Anabaptists in these regions, and had steadfastly refused to follow the Munsterite apostles in Friesland in their revolutionary vagaries. He was a man of some learning, evidently a practising physician. He is sometimes spoken of as a barber, barbering and surgery being twin professions in those days. Just why he withdrew from the Anabaptist movement at this time is not certain. Some say that he no longer had the courage to face the increasing dangers that threatened the lives of the leaders of the cause; others are unkind enough to suggest that he was jealous of the growing influence of his disciple Menno Simons. He himself asserts that he had been deceived in his call to the ministry; that since the disciples of Jan Matthys by whom he had been ordained had themselves been in error, his own call, as well as that of

those whom he in turn had ordained was not apostolic nor valid.

Likely, Obbe had neither the faith nor the courage of his brother Dirk or of Menno. He perhaps had shared the hopes of the Melchiorites that soon the Kingdom of the elect was to be established when the righteous would enter upon their reward. Now Hoffman was languishing in prison at Strasburg, Jan Matthys had met a tragic death, and the righteous everywhere were being crushed out with fire and sword. The future seemed hopeless. Obbe felt himself deceived. What is the use, he may have thought like many another leader of a forlorn cause before him. He had neither the faith nor the heart to continue the struggle. He retired to the city of Rostock on the Baltic where if he kept his opinions to himself he might spend his days without molestation. At any rate his withdrawal, though by no means a death blow to the cause, nevertheless, was a great disappointment to Menno—who spoke of Obbe as a Demas—and as one who gave great comfort to the state churches by his defection. Obbe Philips now drops completely out of Anabaptist history.

In East Friesland

In East Friesland Menno Simons was safe from molestation for a time. Countess Anna,

the ruler at this time was well disposed toward the reformation movement, though the exact nature of the church she hoped to establish under her rule had not yet been fully decided upon. It was during this transition stage that East Friesland became as asylum for the persecuted religious groups of northwestern Germany and Holland, even the Batenburgers and other offshoots of the Munsterites being tolerated. The outstanding event of Menno's stay here was his debate with John a'Lasco, the Polish reformer who had been placed at the head of Anna's religious establishment.

Debate with a'Lasco

This debate, initiated by a'Lasco himself, the outstanding Reformation leader of northern Europe, was held in Emden, the chief sea port of northwestern Germany, and incidently the seat of the oldest Mennonite church of this whole region. The discussion which lasted for three days centered about the main issue which separated the Anabaptists from the state churches—baptism and its allied doctrines, to which were added several others, the calling of ministers and the doctrine of the incarnation.

On the question of baptism Menno advanced the well known arguments familiar to all Anabaptists, while a'Lasco reviewed the

common ground held by all the state churches. On the calling of the ministers also both covered familiar ground already so frequently advanced by earlier champions in various discussions. A'Lasco favored a theologically trained, state controlled ministry, well fed and clothed at public expense. Menno on the other hand advocated a ministry selected from the congregation without reference to theological training, but of a regenerated life, and supported by voluntary contributions. He was especially bitter against the benefices, fat livings, and exalted positions of the state preachers of the Gospel, whom he often spoke of as hirelings.

Menno on the Incarnation

On Menno's view of the incarnation it is necessary to say a few words further; for his theories on this subject were not held by his brethren in Switzerland in that day, nor by those who bear his name anywhere in the world today. His view was not original with him, but was inherited from Obbe Philips who in turn got it from Melchior Hoffman, so far as known its first advocate. Hoffman's peculiar doctrine needs but little elaboration here. He believed, it will be remembered, that Jesus, in order to remain entirely free from sinfulness, had to receive his body elsewhere than through the flesh of Mary. This

view held by all the Anabaptists throughout these regions was especially unacceptable to Menno at first; and was perhaps the chief cause of his hesitancy in joining the Anabaptist movement. But once he accepted it he became its consistent advocate to the end. In his attempts to justify his peculiar explanation of the doctrine, Menno often ventured into biological and philosophical arguments beyond his depth. It would no doubt have been better for him as well as all concerned had he followed the advice of his south German brethren who, in a conference held at Strasburg in 1555, suggested relative to this controversy:

> "The confusion of tongues had come upon the brethren in this matter because they would know more than it was intended they should know."

They should be content, so these practical Germans thought, with the statement, "The word became flesh and tabernacled among us." This should be said, however, in behalf of Menno, he discussed the subject reluctantly, and never chose it for public debate unless forced to it; and it was just as reasonable an attempt to reconcile the divinity of Jesus with his humanity as was the orthodox explanation.

Because of the publicity attracted by this Emden debate Menno found it expedient, in

1544, to seek a new refuge. It was just at this time, too, that Anna urged by her neighboring rulers had agreed upon an order of exile against the various sects that had found temporary refuge within her domain. Acting upon the suggestion of a'Lasco however, she made a distinction between the peaceful followers of Menno and the revolutionary sects of Batenburg, and others. The former who, for the first time, were now designated as "Menists" were not included in the general proscription.

Menno Leaves for Cologne

Menno, however, thought it best to leave East Friesland. For the next two years he found a fruitful field of labor in the Archbishopric of Cologne, where under a tolerant ruler, a spell of liberty was granted to all religious dissenters. He even challenged the theologians of the city of Bonn to a theological discussion, without success however. The restoration of a Romanist ruler, in 1546, again sent him on his travels, this time to the Lutheran Hanseatic free city of Wismar on the Baltic. It was during his stay here that he again met his old friend a'Lasco, though not in a personal debate this time. The latter, who had been forced to leave Emden during the period of the Interim, 1548-1552, had served as the pastor of a flock of Dutch

and north German refugees in London during that time. With the accession of Bloody Mary to the English throne, in 1553, England ceased to be an asylum for continental protestants; but with the Peace of Passau on the other hand, a year earlier, conditions had been reversed in Germany. The Protestant exiles consequently returned to their former homes. It was while a ship load of a'Lasco's followers were seeking a new refuge along the Baltic that one mid-winter day they got caught in the frozen water in Wismar harbor a short distance from shore. But Wismar happened to be a Lutheran town with little sympathy for Zwinglians. It remained, therefore, for the little Mennonite congregation of the place, barely tolerated themselves, to play the part of the good Samaritan to these ice bound exiles. They visited the strangers on ship board, brought them food and drink, and needed medical supplies; and then helped them to shore and found needed work for them for the winter.

One little incident in the course of this procedure surprised and greatly pained Menno. A humble but warm-hearted Mennonite having compassion on the children of a'Lasco, offered to take them into his home and care for them for the winter, but was refused by their tutor, one of the leaders of the party, and a minister, a certain Hermes Backreel,

Inside view of old church at Witmarsum built in early part of eighteenth century on site where tradition says Menno first preached after his renunciation of the priesthood. Site now occupied by Menno Simons Memorial

on the ground that a'Lasco, being of noble birth and having much to do with lords, could not afford to have his children cared for in the home of a humble Mennonite. "I observed," said Menno on hearing of this incident, "that we have not met with the plain, true, humble pilgrims of Christ."

Another Debate

Distressing as the situation of the London exiles was, however, it was not sufficiently so to cool the ardor of their leaders for a theological controversy even with their deliverers. Hardly had they been safely landed before Hermes Backreel, learning that Menno Simons was living in seclusion in the city, sought him out and invited him to a theological debate in the presence of a group of Reformed and Mennonite listeners. Menno hesitated, but finally gave his consent. Hermes, not considering himself a match for Menno, sent to Norden for Martin Micron, a renowned Dutch theologian, who had also been one of the London preachers, and whom the late Professor Dosker, of the Presbyterian Seminary of Louisville, describes as:

> "a man small of stature, but contentious to a degree, always aching for a debate, always urging some disputation, and of course always considering himself the victor."

The debate lasted for several days, covering

all the controversial points of doctrine. At times the argument became quite heated, but ended peacably enough with a common meal. As was usual with discussions of this sort, neither side was convinced, but both were satisfied with themselves.

Menno accused the Zwinglians of unfair dealing in this debate. He entered the discussion reluctantly, he said, and with the understanding that it was to be a private affair, without publicity; and that the proceedings were not to be reported to the town authorities. The Mennonites, it is understood, were merely a tolerated people in this Lutheran town, to be left in peace so long as they carried on their worship in seclusion. Publicity would jeopardize their stay in the city. But contrary to the agreement, Micron and his friends broke their promise. A report of the proceedings was published, with the result that soon after the Reformed, as well as the Mennonites, had to leave the city. Both of the disputants later continued their arguments in print in which neither did himself great credit. Quite as much heat as light was generated by the uncomplimentary adjectives that were hurled back and forth in the printed pages; though it must be admitted that Menno's language was much milder than was Martin's.

Literary Efforts

Menno, in fact, was a voluminous writer throughout this entire period. Most of his literary work consisted of an amplification of his arguments first presented in such debates as noted above, short treatises on the various distinctive Anabaptist doctrines, and replies to attacks made upon him by the various theologians of the day. He often found it difficult to secure publishers for his works, since to print his books was made a criminal offence by imperial edict, punishable by death. Among his most important writings are his "Testimony Against Jan van Leiden," written while still a priest; "Renunciation of Rome," in which he gives his reasons for leaving the Catholic church; the Foundation Book, written early in his ministry, but revised in 1555, in which can be found a complete statement of his mature religious views; and his Comments on the Twenty-fifth Psalm, perhaps from a purely literary point of view by far his best work. His writings were collected and published soon after his death, and appeared in several editions during the seventeenth century, the last time in the Netherlands in 1681. Menno's preeminence among the leaders of the Anabaptist movement in his day, and his dominating influence among their

later followers is no doubt due more to his literary efforts than to any other cause.

Internal Dissensions

Unfortunately, Menno Simons and his brethren were not only forced to defend themselves against enemies from without, but too often there was contention within. As early as 1547 he met Dirck Philips and a number of leading evangelists of the Baltic region for the purpose of disciplining two of their brethren who had drifted from the fundamentals—Adam Pastor, accused of anti-trinitarianism; and Franz de Cuiper, charged with pro-Catholic views. But before disposing of this trial it may not be out of place here first to introduce Menno's co-laborers.

Adam Pastor, earlier known as Roelof Martens, was a Westphalian by birth, a Roman priest who left his Order about the time Menno did. He was ordained with several others in the early forties by Menno Simons and Dirk Philips. A man of broad education and training, "of medium height and without a beard" he was inclined to independent thinking. From the first he disagreed with Menno and Dirk in his interpretation of the doctrine of the incarnation, and later developed liberal theories of the trinity. According to a recent historian who bases his charges upon Pastor's own writings the latter

> "denied the trinity, the pre-existence of Christ, and the personality of the Holy Ghost. He evinced little sympathy with Paul, whose doctrine of salvation was apparently repugnant to him. Christ, His life, His words—that is the content of his religion. He was totally averse to the Munster spirit, evidently a man of a clean life and a kindly disposition. He sided with the other Anabaptists in the rejection of infant baptism; but was against the overvaluation of adult baptism on faith. However, although they called themselves Anabaptists, permitted infant baptism, because they had no faith in any external application of the sacrament."*

Such was Adam Pastor at the time of the Emden meeting.

Of Franz de Cuiper not much is known except that he, too, was one of Menno's appointees to the eldership, being ordained perhaps with Pastor; and that he refused to accept the prevailing Mennonite view of the incarnation and other leading doctrines. He retained a strong leaning toward Catholicism in all his religious thinking; and for that reason was placed under the ban by Menno, against whom he later filed many charges with the ruling authorities in Holland.

About the same time, 1542, Menno and Dirk, the senior elders ordained three others to this high position—Hendrick van Vreden,

*Dosker.

Antonius von Koeln, and Gillis von Aachen. Of van Vreden we know nothing except that he, too, proved faithless to his calling, and joined the party of Pastor.

Antonius von Koeln began his Anabaptist career in Munster, being baptized by Roll in the house of Knipperdoling. He somehow survived the Munster catastrophe, but whether he left before or after the fall of the city is not certain. Likely before, however, for he soon cleared himself of all revolutionary taint, and became one of the most energetic workers for the cause of the non-resistant type of Anabaptism in northwestern Germany. He never agreed with Menno's strict views of discipline, and about 1550 he either was placed under the ban or voluntarily withdrew from the Mennonite movement.

Gillis von Aachen became an Anabaptist as early as 1531. As an elder he later travelled extensively through Holland and northwestern Germany, baptizing it is said more martyrs than any of the other leaders of the movement. He must have been of a vacillating character, for in 1552 Menno placed him under the ban because of a moral lapse, to be reinstated, however, two years later upon confession of guilt. While engaged in evangelistic work he was apprehended in Antwerp in 1557. Under torture he recanted, which cost him his place in van Bracht's

Martyr book, although space was given to many of those who were baptized by him. But recantation availed Gillis nothing. His right arm was cut off at the time of execution, and his body thrown into the flames. Some years before he had been described as "a man of medium size, with a pale face, big eyes, and a pointed brown beard." One of his sons later became a minister in Amsterdam; and his grandson was the well known Doctor Galenus Abrahams de Haan.

Co-laborers

None of these co-laborers of Menno, just mentioned, remained faithful to the end. All at one time or another had been placed under the ban, and but one or two reinstated. Only two of his contemporaries shared with him to the end the responsibilities of guiding the new church through the dangers of the formative years—Leonhard Bouwens, and Dirk Philips, already frequently mentioned.

Leonhard Bouwens

None of these co-laborers of Menno's, just at Sommelsdyk in 1515, and died at Hoorn in 1582. After spending some years as an Anabaptist preacher he was ordained an elder by Menno Simons in Emden, 1551. He was perhaps the most energetic and successful evangelist among the entire group of north-

ern leaders. During his long service as an elder he baptized in Friesland, Holland, Groningen, Brabant and several other Dutch provinces more than ten thousand converts in the course of some thirty years. Considering the fact that this period includes the time when Duke Alva and his Council of Blood was literally combing these provinces for heretics this is a most remarkable and courageous record. Bouwens was a strict disciplinarian, and was perhaps largely personally responsible for the division that occurred within the ranks of the churches because of the strict application during this time of the ban. But even he did not escape church discipline, being relieved of his office by Dirk Philips; but upon the death of the latter he resumed his office on his own initiative and retained it to the end.

Dirck Philips

Next to Menno himself, the most influential of the Anabaptist leaders was Dirk Philips, who was born at Leuwarden, trained for the priesthood, won for the Anabaptist cause by Pieter Houtsager a disciple of Jan Matthys, and in 1536 ordained as an elder by his brother Obbe. Dirk was Menno's most intimate associate in all the important activities of the Mennonite movement, although a little more conservative than the latter on most of the

religious practices common to the faith. Like Menno, too, he wrote numerous treatises and tracts on fundamental doctrines, the most extensive being his "Enchiridion," which remains perhaps the most typical treatise of the conservative Anabaptism of his day. This work was printed in English for the first time in America in 1910 for the use of the Old Order Amish among whom Dirk is still popular because of his strong advocacy of two doctrines still in practice among these people—avoidance, and footwashing. In his later days Dirk is described as "an old man with white hair, of medium stature, dressed in black, with a round cap, and he talked the dialect of the Brabanters." He died in 1568.

These three, Menno, Dirk and Leonhard were the stalwart, unyielding, uncompromising defenders of a rigid reorganized Anabaptist faith, holding fast to the established doctrines to the end, banning all who showed the least desire to stray from the narrow path of orthodoxy as interpreted by them, and hardly able to keep from banning one another. Some sort of division of the field of labor was seemingly agreed upon among them. Dirk resided in Danzig; Menno at Wismar and later in Wuestenfeld; while Leonhard made his headquarters at Emden, though his chief field of effort was in the northern Dutch provinces. All of them how-

ever, found their way occasionally into the Netherlands which remained by far the most fruitful area in results. The congregations of northern Germany remained small and few.

Rigid Disciplinary Measures

All the above mentioned leaders were present at the Emden meeting in 1547. Pastor and Cuiper were disciplined, and finally banned for their liberal views on the trinity, and Catholic doctrine of the incarnation; and it was decided to enforce Dirk's strict interpretation of the ban and avoidance.

The free use of these measures of discipline had by this time become a question of considerable controversy among the Mennonites all through the Low countries. That the practice was driven to unjustifiable lengths there can be no doubt; but a better understanding of the conditions under which Menno worked will lead to a keener appreciation at least, if not a fuller justification of the reasons for these rather harsh measures. The central doctrine of Menno's faith, as already observed, was the "new birth," a regenerated life. "Behold worthy reader," he says,

> "all those who are born of God with Christ who thus conform their weak life to the Gospel, are thus converted, and follow the example of Christ, hear and believe His holy

> Word, follow His commands, which He in plain words commanded us in the Holy Scriptures, for the Holy Christian Church which has the promise."

True religion, in other words, is not merely a set of dogmas and practices; it must bear fruit in a purified life. Menno's most bitter Philippics were hurled not at the beliefs of his state church opponents, but rather at their unfruitful and corrupt lives. It is a well known fact among the historians of the Reformation that the morals of neither laity nor clergy were reformed immediately by the general Reformation movement. As the respect for the old established supports of the social order were undermined, moral standards during the transition period actually sank to a lower level. A popular couplet which went the rounds of the people clearly illustrates, Menno says, the prevailing ideals of license and liberty: "Der Strick ist entzwei; Und Wir sind Frei."*

To Menno and his followers on the other hand the reformation called not for lower but for higher standards of living. "I know of a certainty," he says,

> "that a proud haughty man whoever he may be is no Christian; neither is an avaricious, selfish man, or a drunken, intemperate man, or an unchaste lustful man, or a wrangling,

*Menno's native language of course was Dutch, not German. This is a translation.

> envious, or disbodient, idolatrous man, or a false, lying, or an unfaithful, thievish man, or a defaming, backbiting man, or a bloodthirsty, unmerciful, revengeful man a Christian, even if he were baptized a hundred times and kept the Lord's supper daily; for it is not the ordinances or rites, such as baptism and the Supper, but a true Christian faith with its unblamable good fruits of which the ordinances testify, that makes a true Christian and has the promise of life."

The Christian church made up, according to Menno's ideal, of the regenerated, and not of the entire population; must be without "spot or wrinkle," pure and undefiled, not only in belief but in moral conduct as well. There can be no moral lapse. The Mennonites made the way of life straight and narrow. The state churches left it broad and open; the latter had no way of correcting gross sin; that was a function of the state, not of the church, so they said.

The only means of discipline by which a free voluntary church could be kept up to such a high standard was the ban, through which the unworthy and unfaithful could be excluded and expelled. Against the corrupt sects of the time as Menno calls them, the Davidians, Batenburgers, and the Munsterites who were trying to make inroads among the disciples of Menno, a strict application of the ban was the only adequate defence. "The

Jewel of the Church" he lovingly calls this means of preserving his beloved little flock against the enemies without the gates.

This method of settling church controversies and of disciplining unruly members, which was based on Matthew 18:15-18, might be applied in three different forms according to the seriousness of the fault—mere admonition, with hopes of a reconciliation; denial of access to the communion table; and expulsion from membership for gross sin. Several controversies soon arose among the brethren over the use of this means of discipline: shall a gross sinner be first admonished and given time for repentance before expulsion, as in the case of one guilty of only a minor fault, or shall he be expelled immediately after his guilt is established. Leonhard Bouwens, the strictest of the strict, said, yes, to the latter question; the others, favored leniency.

Avoidance

But more serious even than this difference was the controversy over another practice which followed the ban, called "Avoidance," by which the one excommunicated was to be "avoided" or ostracized by his former fellow members, not only in religious fellowship, but in all business and social relations as well. Scripturally this practice was based on the

Pauline injunction "not to eat" with an unfaithful member (I Cor. 5:11), in order, according to such confessions of faith as advocated it, that he "may be made ashamed and thereby induced to amend his ways." The motive here was most worthy, but unfortunately it was based on poor psychology. But here, too, there were differences of opinion. What did the phrase "not to eat" mean? Did it refer to the communion table only, or to all social relations? Most of the leaders said the latter. How generally should the practice be applied? Could any exceptions be made? Should husband and wife shun one another in case one or the other should be placed under the ban? Again Bouwens said, yes, and would even include bed and board; Dirk agreed with him; Menno on the other hand wavered at first, but being threatened by Bouwens with the ban himself if he did not side in with the conservatives, he half-heartedly consented to join the strict banners, a fact which in his later years he regretted. He could never quite give his hearty consent to this practice. The consciences of the parties concerned, he said, should rule in the matter.

These hard regulations of the conjugal relations seem all the more strange when we remember that among the Mennonites the institution of marriage was a sacred one. Not

quite so sacred, perhaps, as among the Catholics who made it a sacrament, but certainly much more sacred than with Luther, who said, "Marriage is an outward carnal thing like other worldly matters. Just as I may eat, drink, walk, ride, buy, and talk with the heathen, Jew or Turk and heretic, so may I also enter the married life with him and remain therein." To the Mennonites who, so to say, took a middle view this was rank heresy. Marriage could be contracted only "in the Lord," which meant among members of the same faith, here, Anabaptists. Marriage with outsiders was punishable with the ban. Divorce and separation were permitted only conditionally, and on New Testament grounds. But sacred as the institution was among the Mennonites it was not exempt among the conservatives from the blighting influences of the avoidance. Whether the practice was maintained because of, or in spite of the sacredness of the marriage tie, may be a debatable question. Its chief excuse, perhaps, was the lack of literal Scriptural ground for its exemption, though there were plenty of social grounds. Mixed marriages were opposed of course because they were not "in the Lord" and incidentally, because they would threaten the integrity of the church.

These various questions had disturbed the

brethren not a little for some years. They were discussed, at the Emden meeting of 1547, and at later conferences, and finally at Wismar in 1554 when a number of the leaders laid down a set of rules on these as well as other subjects for the use of the churches. According to these rules marriage with outsiders was forbidden; separation was permitted only in case one of the other party led an immoral life; marital avoidance was to be enforced in its most rigid form; business relations to be carried on with an apostate only in cases of extreme necessity; children were advised to marry only with the consent of their parents; just debts might be collected, but no unusual pressure was to be applied in doing so; bearing arms in military service was strictly prohibited; and finally, no one was to preach unless duly ordained by the proper church authorities.

An Unfortunate Division

The attempt to enforce these hard rules raised a storm in certain quarters. Leonhard Bouwens and Gillis von Aachen decided to apply them to the letter in their jurisdictions. The trouble started when a little Dutch woman by the name of Zwaantje Rutgers, with notions of her own, refused to deny her banned husband "bed and table" according to the regulations. Bouwens insisted. Zwaantje

had some friends. A division soon appeared in several of the congregations, especially Emden and Franeker. The factions appealed to Menno, who advised moderation, suggesting that the consciences of the parties concerned should govern in the matter. But all to no avail. Bouwens and his party insisted on enforcement, banning to the right and left all those who disagreed with him, even threatening Menno himself. The two churches were rent in twain, and the division was carried to other churches until the whole Lowland region was aflame with the controversy. The strict party was sometimes called the party of the "Hard Banners"; while the milder group came to be known as the "Mild Banners," or sometimes Waterlanders because many of the congregations were found in a region in southern Holland known as Waterland. Leonhard, on the other hand, complimented the latter with the euphonious and suggestive title "Dung Carts." Of course each party banned the other.

This controversy even reached the Anabaptists of south Germany. In two conferences held in Strasburg in 1555 and 1557, the Germans and Swiss discussed both, the peculiar view of the Dutch Mennonites on the incarnation, as well as their strict interpretation of the ban and avoidance. On both questions they disagreed with their Dutch breth-

ren. In order to learn of the true situation in the Low Countries, and also, to attempt a reconciliation of the two factions, the latter conference sent a delegation of three men to Menno's home for the purpose of learning his views on the matter, and then, with this information, to visit the various Dutch congregations in an effort to establish harmony. But these men failed so utterly in their designs that their well meant efforts ended only in still greater confusion, and the situation was made worse rather than better. Not only did the breach among the Dutch congregations remain, but now was added a new cleavage—between the Dutch and the German churches.

Menno's Declining Years

Menno Simons was greatly disturbed by these events in his declining years, and travelled extensively among the disaffected congregations in the interests of harmony, but to no avail. Near the close of his life it is said he regretted having agreed to the strict interpretation of the ban; and to have advised his close friends not to be a "slave of men" as he had been.

In the meantime, in 1555, the Anabaptist congregation at Wismar was exiled by a general order of the Lutheran Hanseatic League, of which that city was a member. Menno,

weary and discouraged, chose as a final resting place the little Anabaptist village of Wuestenfeld, a few miles beyond Oldesloe, in Holstein, on an estate called Fresenburg, owned by a certain count Bartholomew von Ahlefeld. This nobleman had learned of the economic worth of the Mennonites while in the Netherlands, and had invited them to settle on his estate. Here he defended them against all attempts of imperial and local authorities to persecute them. Menno was even permitted to set up a printing press of his own near a little building, now within the shadow of a magnificent Linden, which tradition says goes back to the days of the exiled printer himself. Why this place came to be Wuestenfeld (waste field) is not quite certain. An old chronicler suggests that it was because the spot on which the village was built had, but a short time before, been cleared of a dense forest of oak. Perhaps so. In this village Menno died on January 13, 1561, in the sixty-sixth year of his age; and, according to a custom not unknown among the Anabaptists of that day, was buried in his own garden. The exact place of burial remained unknown for many years, because during the Thirty Years War the village was destroyed, and its site forgotten. But the memory of the traditional location was kept alive among the descendants of an old Men-

nonite family of Hamburg that had known Menno; and later excavations seemed to corroborate the tradition. At any rate, in 1902, the church at Hamburg marked the supposed spot with an appropriate monument. Wuestenfeld is a misnomer today. The monument stands upon a little knoll in the middle of a large pasture lot bordered by magnificent groves of oak, in which, during a midsummer visit by the author some years ago, a fine herd of sleek and well fed Holstein cattle were browsing knee deep upon a luxurious growth of rich, deep green grass.

Hero Stories

The numerous hero stories that accumulated about the name of Menno in course of time after his death no doubt, like the story of George Washington's hatchet, are based not so much on fact as upon the natural tendency of humankind to worship its heroes. The story of Menno's miraculous escape from capture one time by a shrewd answer returned from the driver's seat of a coach to the question of his would be captors has also been told of other men. The fate that tied the tongue of a would be betrayer who had agreed to betray Menno as he was passing by in a boat, but who was unable to utter a word until it was too late to accomplish his purpose, seems to be too good to be true.

Even Menno's own recital, no doubt honestly believed, of stories of Divine vengeance visited upon his enemies may have been the result of over credulity. The clergyman who was struck dead in the pulpit while denouncing the Anabaptist leader may have died from perfectly natural causes rather than as a result of direct Divine displeasure.

Menno's Place in History

Menno Simons deserves a higher rank among the great reformers than has thus far been accorded him by writers of church history. Although he did not play as conspicuous a role as did his contemporaries—Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, his real greatness cannot be measured by the more humble part he seemed to play in the religious arena of his time. His task in many respects was a much more difficult one than that of the founders of the state churches. They relied upon a union of state and church, and upon the support of the strong arm of the political powers to maintain their system. Menno, on the other hand, rested his appeal upon the persuasive power of love and the simple truth of the gospel as sufficient to secure the permanency of the true church. He was centuries ahead of his day on many of the fundamentals of religious and civil liberty which today in America and the more enlightened parts of

Europe are taken for granted, such as religious toleration, separation of church and state, and the desirability of universal peace. As the world grows into a realization of these great fundamental ideals Menno Simons' place as a pioneer will become more and more secure.

Menno Simons, it will be observed, was not the founder of a new church; but merely the leader, perhaps the most influential during a critical period of a movement already well under way. It was quite common then, as now, for religious groups to take the name of their leaders. Lutheranism itself is no exception. The Anabaptist parties followed the same rule. Among the earliest were the **Melchiorites,** the **Obbenites,** and the **Dirkites.** The term Menist was first used, as noted elsewhere, by Countess Anna of East Friesland, in 1544, as a distinguishing term between the peaceful and the revolutionary Anabaptist parties.

The Name Mennonite

The peaceful followers of Menno were especially averse to being called "**Wederdoopers,**" the common term applied in the Low Countries to all who practiced adult baptism of whatever party, and that for two reasons. First, because the word implied an earlier baptism; but since the Mennonites did not

recognize the validity of infant baptism, they maintained that the administering of the rite in adult years upon confession of faith was the first and only true baptism, and not a rebaptism. Second, the odious term: "Wederdooper" everywhere signified Munsterite. And so they were glad for any name that would set them apart from the Anabaptists of the Munster variety. **Doopsgezinde** (baptism minded) was much less odious, and gained general acceptance among them. But for a time **Menist,** too, was quite generally used to designate the peaceful Dutch Anabaptists. After the granting of religious toleration by William of Orange, the name **Menist** might again have fallen into disuse, had it not been revived for a time as a factional name. During the controversy over the ban with the division of the church into a strict and a liberal party, the strict faction, the Flemish and Frisians, who accepted Menno's conservative views on this question were again known as **Menists;** but the Waterlanders, the Upper Germans, and the Young Frisians, the liberal elements, repudiating the name of their rivals, preferred the name **Doopsgezinde.** As party strife died out during the eighteenth century, and as the Dutch churches began to depart from many of the earlier views of Menno, not only on this but on many other questions, Doopsgezinde came

into general use, and was finally adopted as the official title of the Holland church as a whole.

There was little contact in the early days between the **Doopsgezinde** of Holland and the German and Swiss **Taeufer,** or **Taufgesinnte,** or **Brethren** as they preferred to be known. The term **Menist,** however, was well known, and not unpopular in the latter regions during the eighteenth century when the big hearted Dutch Mennonites so generously helped their oppressed brethren in the Palatinate and Switzerland. Mennonite was not generally used, however, in these regions. In France, Anabaptist seemingly was not unpopular. One recent writer suggests that Mennonite, as distinguished from Anabaptist, was especially in use in those countries in which the imperial decrees against them were effective—Germany and the Netherlands, but not Switzerland and France. But under whatever name these descendants of the peaceful Anabaptists went, they were essentially of one faith, and ultimately recognized each other as members of a common branch of the church. They recognized one another as fellow Mennonites, and are today the only survivors, with the exception of a small group of Huterites in the Dakotas and Canada, of that brave and pious people of the early Reformation days known as Anabaptists.

MENNONITES OF TODAY

The followers of Menno Simons today throughout the world, counting unbaptized children as well as actual members, as is done in all European religious statistics, equal nearly one-half million, one-third of whom live in Europe and two-thirds in the Americas—North and South.

The Anabaptist movement out of which Mennonitism developed in the early sixteenth century was confined almost exclusively to the Rhine valley, and the Germanic people—Dutch and German; and was at first largely a city movement. In the course of a few years, however, after most of the leaders had been killed off, and the movement itself stamped out in the middle Rhine valley, only two centers of Mennonitism remained by the close of the century—Holland at the mouth of the river, and German Switzerland near the source, together with a small group of Moravians near the upper reaches of the Danube. In its early days Mennonitism was permeated with a strong missionary zeal, but fierce persecution soon drove the whole movement under cover, and made missionary effort almost impossible. Few new converts were added to the faith after the first century. In fact Mennonites did not hold their own.

Except in Russia and America in later years, most of their own families forsook the faith of their fathers. And so, Mennonites today the world over wherever found are the direct lineal descendants of one of these two original groups—Dutch or Swiss Mennonite names everywhere are either the one or the other. Intermarriage with outsiders being forbidden by the rules of the church within, and the making of converts by the governments without, Mennonites today in all parts of the world are as purely Swiss or Dutch biologically as though they had been born in the land of their parental origin. The growth of the Mennonite church through the centuries has not been so much the expansion of a faith as the swarming of a people.

Persecution, real or fancied, drove the more conscientious and tender minded from one country to another in search of that religious liberty which we have always regarded as the final goal of a true democracy, and the objective of all social and religious progress. The Dutch, in the late sixteenth century, migrated to the lower Vistula region in what is now Danzig, Poland, and East Prussia. About one-half of these left Prussia during the latter part of the eighteenth century because of limitations placed upon their religious liberties by the Prussian kings, to accept empress Catherine's invitation to locate on the steppes

of south Russia. And finally, about one-third of these Russians, the more tenderminded portion of them, driven out of their home lands during the early seventies of the past century by the militarism then engulfing all Europe, located on the western plains of Manitoba and Kansas.

Swiss Mennonites forced out of Switzerland during the early eighteenth century located in the Palatinate and Alsace. From here many of them soon after came to Pennsylvania, joining with other Palatines to form that picturesque element of the Keystone state population known as the Pennsylvania Dutch.

Roughly speaking then, one may say that of pure Swiss stock, as pure biologically as though born in the original fatherland, and with pure Swiss names often Anglisized somewhat, are the Mennonites today in the Palatinate, France, the United States east of the Mississippi, and in Ontario; of pure Dutch stock likewise, and names, are the Mennonites of Russia, of the lower Vistula region, in the United States west of the Mississippi, in Manitoba and the western Canadian provinces, and in Mexico and South America.

Strange to say that although the universal language of the Mennonites everywhere is German, except Holland of course, yet none of the Mennonites anywhere today, not even

in Germany itself originally came from within the borders of present Germany.

The EUROPEAN Mennonites though separated into a number of regional groups are not divided as are their American brethren into so many distinct, independent offshoots. Although differing occasionally in religious practises and even in certain points of doctrinal orthodoxy, yet they are more tolerant of one another than the Americans. The Mennonites of one region may not altogether agree with those of another. The Swiss peasants may be more conservative in their religious thinking than their more liberal Dutch city brethren. But within each region—Switzerland, Holland, the Palatinate Danzig and East Prussia—there is only one organized body. Russia before the war was a slight exception. You do not find as in America half a score or more of Mennonite churches in the same neighborhood bearing a different label and usually with no religious affiliations with one another. At the recent World All-Mennonite Congress held at Amsterdam all groups were represented.

Although Menno Simons likely would not claim all those who bear his name in Europe today, yet all the groups are still committed to a number of the distinctive doctrines first advocated by that apostle of the non-resistant

life—including the doctrine of voluntary church membership which naturally presupposes complete separation of church and state, and the rejection of infant baptism; rather strange to say opposition to the use of the oath; democratic and congregational church rule; general insistence upon the virtue of living the simple life;—but on the other hand also complete repudiation of non-resistance, especially as applied to war; extreme individualism in the interpretation of religious truth with its resultant laxness of discipline for breach of faith.

The largest of these regional and national groups is the DUTCH church, consisting of some seventy thousand souls, unbaptized children as well as baptized members. These are found mostly in the northern provinces. Unlike Mennonites elsewhere who are largely a country folk, the Dutch have a number of large city churches. Amsterdam has a congregation of nearly eight thousand members; Haarlem has over four thousand; the Hague, three; and Rotterdam one of thirteen hundred: other large congregations are found in Utrecht, Groningen, Alkmaar, Leyden and other cities. Perhaps half of the entire membership is found in half a score of the larger cities.

It is perhaps due largely to this fact that the Dutch Mennonites have always exerted a

much larger influence upon the political and cultural life of their nation than have the Mennonites of other lands. The first president of the World Court at the Hague was a Mennonite, as was for many years the president of the Dutch National Central Bank. Like the Quakers in England the Mennonites in Holland exert an influence upon the political, economic and cultural life of their nation far beyond their numbers.

Once split up into numerous factions, the Dutch Mennonites have since been united under one organization called the "Algemeene Doopsgezinde Societeit" usually spoken of as the A. D. S. Practically all their ministers are educated in their own Seminary, which is affiliated with the University of Amsterdam; and all are salaried. Theologically the Mennonites of Holland are liberal in their thinking. In recent years as a result of English Quaker influence a small group of intelligent young men and women, evangelically and peace-minded, have started a movement which is known under the name "Gemeentetagbewegung," an arbitrary term which does not adequately describe its real character, whose chief purpose is to revive within the church at large some of her earlier evangelical orthodoxy, and especially her former peace doctrines. The organization has established several summer camps throughout

the country, and issues an official publication called "Brieven." The organ of the official A. D. S. is the "Zondagsbode."

The few congregations in NORTHWESTERN GERMANY—Krefeld, Emden, Norden and Hamburg-Altona have more in common with the Dutch, culturally and religiously, than with the rest of the German churches. These, too, have exerted unusual influence upon the economic and political development of their regions. Worthy of mention are the von Beckeraths, influential in the Frankfurt parliament of 1848; the van der Smissens, the great merchants of Hamburg in the heyday of the whale fishing industry; the van der Leyens, founders and chief promoters of the silk industry in Crefeld, the van Deldens of Gronau, today the largest cotton textile manufacturers in Germany, and many others.

In the VISTULA delta—Danzig, Poland and East Prussia—the Mennonites here with the exception of the large city church in Danzig live on large fertile farms. Their churches are country churches, with farmer preachers who have little theological training and get little financial support. They are more conservative in their religious views than the Dutch.

In SOUTHWESTERN GERMANY there are about five thousand Mennonite souls scattered throughout thirty-seven small congre-

gations in the Rhine-Pfalz, Baden, Wurtemberg, Bavaria and Hesse. They are for the most part small farmers living in small farm villages. The congregation at Weierhof, a village consisting entirely of Mennonites where the well known Dr. Neff is pastor is the largest congregation in this region, and embraces a membership of three hundred and seventy. Many of the ministers have a limited training for their work and get some support. They also support a "Reiseprediger." The "Gemeindeblatt" is the official organ of the south German church. The Conference also publishes the "Christliche Gemeinde Kalender." The "Mennonitische Lexicon" a strictly private enterprise, and next to the Martyrs Mirror of the middle seventeenth century the most ambitious and most useful literary enterprise ever undertaken by any Mennonites is edited and published by two members of this group—Christian Hege of Frankfurt, and Dr. Christian Neff. The "Realschule" founded at Weierhof in 1867 as a Mennonite institution, but later transformed into a semi-public high school with Dr. Neff in charge of the religious instruction, has recently been turned over to the government to be converted into a training school for National Socialist leaders. Bible courses are given each year at Thomashof, a Mennonite health resort near Durlach in Baden.

All these German churches with the exception of a group of conservative congregations in Wurtemberg and Baden are united into a general Union of German Churches. The official organ of this union and the German churches in general is the "Mennonitische Blaetter" ably edited by Lic. theol. E. Haendiges, pastor of the Ebling-Ellerwald congregation in East Prussia. Like their brethren in Holland the Germans have even more completely repudiated their time honored principles of non-resistance. Very few during the recent war took advantage of the non-combatant privileges still open to them at that time.

The SWISS Mennonites are found in the canton of Bern, in the region of the Emmenthal, home of world famous cheese, and in the Jura region near Basel. They, too, belong mostly to the small farmer class, quite conservative in their views, with a semi-trained ministry selected out of the laity,—about holding their own—some fifteen hundred members.

By far the largest number of the FRENCH Mennonites live in Alsace and Loraine which before the war belonged to Germany. There are twenty-five congregations here now with a total population of about four thousand. Originally these congregations were of the Amish persuasion, but they are no longer so

called, having discarded all their earlier distinctive Amish customs. "Christ Seul" is the title of a small religious paper issued by the French conference. The French language and the tense nationalistic feeling between the French and German people will no doubt make a close religious fellowship between these two churches increasingly difficult. There was no direct representative of the French church at the recent World Congress at Amsterdam.

Of the RUSSIAN Mennonites not much need be said here. Before the war they were the most prosperous and best organized of all the European Mennonite groups, and embraced a total population of nearly one hundred thousand souls. Some twenty-five thousand have since escaped to Canada and Paraguay; many died during the period of anarchy and persecution following the World War; others were exiled to the far north and died of starvation and exposure. Those who know best claim that the number of survivors is not above fifty thousand. The Bolshevist government is doing its best to totally destroy the organized Mennonite church, and especially to wean away the children from the ancient faith. How well they shall succeed remains to be seen; but the future looks dark both for the Mennonite faith and the Mennonite people. The Russian Men-

nonites were the one European group that had retained their non-resistant principles up to the time of the last war. During the war nearly the entire young manhood, some ten thousand, took up hospital instead of regular military service, and organized complete hospital units, among the best in the entire Russian army. After the war, however, following the collapse of the Kerensky government, when Machno and his robber band ravaged the Mennonite settlements, many of the young men forgot their non-resistant principles and took up arms against the robbers. Most of them have since felt that this was a mistake, and that they would have fared much better had they remained true to their traditional principles. What their attitude would be now on the question of war participation is not known. There is practically no organized Mennonite church life in Russia.

The Mennonites of AMERICA today—North and South—comprise a population of about three hundred thousand. Of these some two hundred thousand are found in the United States; perhaps eighty or more in Canada; five or six in Mexico; and a few more in South America. Mennonites like millions of other immigrants to America came to better their economic condition, but also in search of religious liberty. These migrations fall into four broad periods:—

1. From 1709 to 1754. During this period from twenty-five hundred to three thousand Mennonites came from the Palatinate and Alsace to southeastern Pennsylvania. They were preceded in 1683 and the years immediately following by less than a score of families from northwestern Germany who founded the first German settlement in America in Germantown. Included among these Palatines were several hundred Amish.

2. From 1820 to 1860 approximately three thousand Swiss and South German Mennonites and Alsatian Amish urged on by the economic aftermath following the Napoleonic wars, and the fears of increasing militarism located largely on the cheap lands of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois.

3. Between 1874 and 1880 some eighteen thousand Mennonites from south Russia, refusing to accept the substitute forestry service in lieu of actual military service offered them by the Czar in the new Russian conscription act passed at that time, migrated to what was at that time the American frontier line—Manitoba, Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska and Kansas. After the World war five or six thousand of the children and grandchildren of these settlers in Manitoba left their Canadian home for a new location in Mexico, because the Manitoban government asked them to use the English language in

their public schools. These have since regretted this hasty step and have since made unsuccessful overtures to the Canadian government for permission to return.

4. The last large migration took place after the World war from 1923 to 1930 when some twenty thousand Mennonites from south Russia found their way to the western provinces of Canada and from six to seven thousand to Paraguay and Brazil.

As a result of these various migrations from different parts of Europe at different times, and because of divisions within the churches here the Mennonites of America are divided into a number of separate groups which often have very little religious affiliation with one another. Historians mention the proverbial seventeen; but there are more. Among the most important of these are—

1. The OLD MENNONITES, embracing nearly one-half of the entire membership in the United States. These are for the most part descendants of the first Mennonite immigrants to Pennsylvania. They are quite conservative, still demanding certain dress uniformity especially among their women folk,—bonnets instead of hats, and the conventional prayer-head covering. For men the plain coat is recommended, and the mustache forbidden. Under the ban also are

jewelry, secret societies, life insurance and marrying outside the fold. Footwashing is universally practised in connection with the communion service. Characteristic of the Old Mennonite world view is a general attitude of unworldliness called Nonconformity which demands as little of political and social affiliation with the rest of society as possible; and of religious association with other groups none whatever. Breaches of conduct and departure from the faith are punishable with strict disciplinary measures. These are the official regulations of the church, but in practise they are not always rigorously carried out. The ministers, largely of the farmer class, are chosen from the laity sometimes still by lot, and receive no stated support. Most of the young people attend high schools, and many find their way to their own and other colleges.

2. The GENERAL CONFERENCE OF MENNONITES OF NORTH AMERICA is the official title of the second largest American group, and consists within the United States and Canada of about fifty thousand souls. They are made up of most of the Russian immigrants of the seventies, the Swiss, and a group of Pennsylvania congregations which followed J. H. Oberholtzer out of the Old Mennonite church in the middle of the past century. These have discarded all dress

regulations, and follow a more liberal policy in their relation to the outside world than their Old Mennonite brethren. For the most part their ministers are theologically trained. The original aim of the General Conference is to ultimately unite all Mennonites into one body.

3. The MENNONITE BRETHREN, consisting of some twenty-five thousand souls, are a branch of the Russian group and found principally in the western part of the United States and Canada. They are decidedly evangelical, rather emotionally inclined and rather easy subjects of new religious movements; and being addicted to immersion, on friendly relations with the Baptists.

4. The MENNONITE BRETHREN IN CHRIST with a population of twenty thousand, found principally in the eastern United States and Canada, are the outgrowth of a number of small offshoots from the Pennsylvania churches.

5. The OLD ORDER AMISH in number about fifteen thousand, the descendants of the Pennsylvania Amish are the most conservative of them all. They still wear hooks and eyes, beards and long hair, and home-made clothes. They still oppose the use of telephones, automobiles, radios, meeting houses,

high schools, suspenders and many other modern practises and devices unknown in the days of Jacob Amman some two hundred and forty years ago.

6. The CENTRAL CONFERENCE of Mennonites embracing some six thousand members and unbaptized children, is an outgrowth of certain Illinois Amish congregations who some fifty years ago under the leadership of Joseph Stucky organized a separate church. This is one of the smaller but at the same time one of the more progressive of all the groups.

Among other smaller branches of the Mennonite denomination, to mention only the more important are the Defenseless Mennonites, the Krimmer Brethren, Church of God in Christ Mennonite, Kleine Gemeinde and several others. The Huterites found now nearly entirely in Canada perhaps should also be mentioned in a survey of Mennonites.

Nearly all the American Mennonites are still a country people, and that may explain their conservatism as compared with their European brethren. All branches are still thoroughly non-resistant, and opposed to war, partly no doubt because many of the immigrants came from Europe at different times to escape military conscription. They all demand a high standard of family life and social

morality. Divorce is practically unknown among them.

There is a growing demand among all groups for higher education. There are three Mennonite colleges—Bethel supported by the General Conference, Bluffton, by the General and Central Conferences, and Goshen, supported by the Old Mennonites. About eight hundred Mennonite students were in attendance in these colleges during the past year. Besides there are a number of secondary and Bible schools. Each branch supports its own church publication. Among the most important periodicals are the Gospel Herald, Mennonite, Bundesbote, Christian Evangel, Zionsbote, Gospel Banner, and Wahrheitsfreund.

IMPORTANT DATES IN THE LIFE OF MENNO

1. Born in Witmarsum, Friesland, 1496
2. Consecrated as a priest 1524.
3. Renounced the Catholic church 1536, and soon after joined the Dutch Anabaptists.
4. Married perhaps 1539.
5. Outlawed by imperial decree of Charles V., 1541.
6. Left Netherlands for northern Germany 1543.
7. A Refugee in the Archbishopric of Cologne 1544 to 1546.
8. Debate with John a'Lasco 1544.
9. Flight to Wismar 1546.
10. Debate with Martin Micron at Wismar 1554.
11. Died and buried at Wuestenfelde 1561.

MENNO'S WRITINGS*

Plain and Clear Proof Against the Blasphemy of John of Leiden.

The Spiritual Resurrection.

Meditation on the Twenty-Fifth Psalm.

The New Birth.

The Foundation.

Christian Baptism.

The Reason Why I Do Not Cease Teaching.

Of the True Christian Faith.

Loving Admonition (on Discipline).
Brief and Clear Confession (to John a'Lasco).
Clear Account on Excommunication.
Confession of the Triune God.
Questions and Answers (on Discipline).
Confession Concerning Justification.
Brief Defense to all Theologians.
Humble Supplication to all Magistrates.
Defense and Reply Concerning False Accusations.
The Cross of Christ.
Reply to Gellius Faber.
Confession (on the Incarnation in reply to a 'Lasco).
Reply to Martin Micron.
Duties Toward Children.
Instruction on Excommunication.
Answer to Sielis and Lemeke.

*See John Horsch; Menno Simons. p. 300.

WELL KNOWN BOOKS ON MENNO SIMONS

1. H. Kakels. Het Volk van Menno. Leiden. 1908.
2. J. N. Brown. The Life and Times of Menno, the Celebrated Dutch Reformer. Philadelphia. 1853.
   Also translated into German.
3. A. M. Cramer. Het Leven en de Verrigtingen van Menno Simons. Amsterdam 1837.
4. John Horsch. Menno Simons, His Life, Labors and Teachings, Scottdale, Pa., 1916.
5. W. J. Kuehler. Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Doopsgezinden in de Zestiende Eeuw. Harlem 1932.
6. Mennonitische Blaetter. Hamburg-Altona. Numerous articles scattered throughout all the issues from 1854 to 1935 especially No. 1, 1909.
7. B. C. Roosen. Menno Simons. Leipzig 1848.
8. K. Vos. Menno Simons. Leiden 1914.
9. Cornelius Krahn. Menno Simons. Karlsruhe 1936.